



Meeting Notes

Attendees: See description below

Date/Time: December 9, 2008

Project No.: 10766.00

Place: Town Hall

Re: Adams Master Plan

Notes taken by: Ralph Willmer, AICP
Darlene Wynne, AICP

Town of Adams Master Plan KICK-OFF MEETING NOTES December 9, 2008

VHB conducted its Community Immersion Day with the Town of Adams on December 9, 2008. Members of the VHB Team attending were Ken Schwartz, AICP, Principal-in-charge, Ralph Willmer, AICP, Project Manager, Darlene Wynne, AICP, Project Planner, Matt Chase, PE, PTOE, Transportation Planner, and Darren Mochrie (RKG Associates).

A broad range of individuals attended the three interview slots (10:30 AM, 1 PM, and 2:30 PM). Included among those participating were members of the Board of Selectmen, Planning Board, Conservation Commission, Zoning Board of Appeals, Town staff (including Donna Cesan, AICP, Community Development Director, Jay Levine, Town Planner, and Penelope Fehr, Community Development Planner), and local business owners. Participants were asked to identify Adams' strengths/assets, challenges/threats/weaknesses, opportunities, and hot button issues. At 4 PM, the VHB Team met with members of the Master Plan Steering Committee.

The following is the summary of the comments made by the groups we met with throughout the day. A list of attendees is attached to this summary.

STRENGTHS / ASSETS

- People
- Code Enforcement Officer* (last two years)
- Topia Arts Center / Hotel
- Culture – mix of ethnicities, religions, cultures, ages
- Religious community
- Historic village

- Good public services – police; fire; water quality and quantity; sewage capacity
- Beautiful architecture
- Natural beauty – mountains, Greylock Glen
- Active dairy farms / agriculture
- History (Quaker Meeting House, Susan B. Anthony)
- Schools – particularly teachers; connect with parents
- Ashuwillticook Bike Trail*
- Hoosic River (although it is channelized)
- Park Street corridor
- Summer Street Merchants Association
- Safety
- Rural character – sustained through a “quirk of geography”
- Location – access to cultural and natural resources (a jumping off point)
- Small, quiet feel
- Cost of living is moderate
- Great place to raise a family
- Pride in private ownership
- Community events – Friday night @ movies, tree lighting, etc. *
- Visitor’s Center*
- Private Investment (Plunkett, Jones Block, Waverly Building, Greylock)

* These are strengths/assets that have occurred in the last three to five years.

CHALLENGES / THREATS / WEAKNESSES

- Church closings – losing heritage and great buildings
- Location – regional access to major roads
- Survival of schools – poor condition of buildings (related to tax revenue); middle school closing; charter school draining town money
- Decreasing tax revenue
- “Youth flight” – Leave and don’t return (related to lack of employment opportunities)
- Employment opportunities – lack of industry
- Aging community (30% of population)
- Internet access / communications
- Political network that is tough for newcomers
- Certain regulations can be an impediment to growth – particularly around the Hoosic River; the 200-foot Riverfront NDZ can be reduced to 25 feet if political will exists; will facilitate development
- Loss of population
- Political and fiscal negligence by politicians
- Wal-mart and big box retail
- Business turnover
- Duality of Summer and Park Streets

- Stormwater runoff issues (need stormwater bylaw)
- Condition of buildings – many deteriorating (residential and commercial)
- Increase in “transient” population, or newcomers who are not invested in community
- Low cost housing – too much of it that is in poor condition (Section 8 rental)
- Route 8 – marginal and run-down businesses
- Loss of Registry of Deeds in downtown
- Zoning restricts certain improvements to residential properties (e.g. porches)
- Summer Street
- Parking is a perceived problem
- Number of cars passing through (not stopping) and truck traffic (noise)
- Access to Greylock Glen (Friend Street)
- Business mix
- Business training and support
- Planning is getting stale
- Failure to adapt to changing times

OPPORTUNITIES

- Underutilized buildings – Armory, 25 Park Street, Butler Wholesale, Mills, Old Stone Mill
- Residential geared towards higher incomes – provide housing that attracts a different demographic to increase income diversity
- Selective demolition of inadequate buildings to improve value of other properties
- New industry – think tank; green technologies; alternative energy
- Greylock Glen
- Business (and employment) training and support
- Marketing Adams / local identity – give people a reason to come to/stay in Adams; primarily because of proximity to resources (to colleges, real estate agents, employers)
- Wayfinding signage
- Connections between downtown and Greylock Glen (possible open space acquisition)
- Business types – niche stores, restaurants, lodging, destination retail, youth hostel
- Topia Arts Center – needs assistance
- Route 8 corridor – use of the river for fishing; services; not industry
- Orientation of roadway (e.g. making Park Street one-way)
- Business condominium for common uses that don’t require Route 8 frontage
- Streetscape / sidewalk width along Park Street
- Private investment
- Partnering with institutions (academic and medical/health)
- Innovative resources – such as James Taylor, other celebrities
- Tapping into “old” local money before the youth gets it and leaves
- Identify quick wins

- Re-excite people

HOT BUTTON ISSUES

- Greylock Glen – has been going on for 40 years; people aren't excited about it anymore
- Churches
- Park Street / Summer Street duality
- Route 8 corridor
- Condition of buildings / certain landlords
- State funding – Adams receives significantly less money and attention than N. Adams and Pittsfield

MEETING WITH RAY SMITH

Ralph Willmer and Darren Mochrie met with Ray Smith, Vice President for Marketing and Operations for the Berkshires Visitors Center. The following items were discussed:

- \$100 million biotech facility has been proposed in North Adams, funded through Governor Patrick's Life Sciences legislation, to provide education and training in a corporate park setting
- tourism is a viable and healthy component of the economy
 - Boston and NY are nearby affluent feeder markets
- 2.5 million visitors to the region annually
 - 20 - 30,000 annual visitors to the Center
 - signage directing people to the Center was recently established – previously hard to find Center and figure out where to park. Signage could still be improved.
- plan to broaden distribution of marketing brochures
- tourism season generally runs from Late June through October
- not enough hotel chain options – area known more for bed & breakfasts and inns
- Adams is on the route to various portions of the region although people tend to bypass Adams by travelling on Rt. 7
- people need a reason to stop and visit Adams
 - Greylock Glen will help
 - Topia is seen as a key attraction
 - extension of bike trail will help

- suggests that resources should not be focused on one major initiative – need to think about multiple economic development approaches
- wayfinding signage from Adams to Greylock Glen will be important
- Adams was ranked #100 of top 100 towns by an outdoor magazine earlier in 2008 – town needs to capitalize on that (note: Adams was actually ranked 199 out of 200 top 200 towns for Outdoorsmen)

MASTER PLAN STEERING COMMITTEE

The VHB Team met with the Master Plan Steering Committee at the end of the day to describe the planning process and what was learned during the Community Immersion Day. Among the points raised during this session was the following:

- there are two historic districts in Adams and they are important resources
- risk is that this is perceived as “just another plan”. We need to be cognizant of recent planning efforts and show how this one distinguishes itself, it should not be a long, drawn out process, and should avoid “fatigue over lack of implementation”.
- invite State Representative and Senator to be part of the process
- with loss of Amory and middle school, there will be a lack of indoor recreational opportunities
- quality of rental apartments is an issue
- need more people downtown – housing
- satellite campuses for educational institutions would be good economic catalyst
- Rt. 8 north of downtown – two major businesses will not be able to relocate (gravel operation and chemical plant) – treat that corridor as transition zone toward downtown
 - can Lowe’s succeed in bringing people into Adams – how does Town take advantage of that?
- hotels needed
- need age restricted housing to meet growing elderly population needs
- fitness center would be a good downtown use to encourage
- engage high school students in planning effort
- health care can be an important economic development opportunity
- environmental buy-in important for Greylock Glen
- town wide internet access important